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TAGS: [FR](#) [KDEM](#) [LE](#) [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [SY](#)  
SUBJECT: FRENCH NATIONAL SECURITY ADVISOR'S VIEWS ON MIDDLE  
EAST

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Classified By: Political Minister-Counselor Josiah Rosenblatt, reasons  
1.4 (b) and (d).

[11](#). (S) Summary: French NSA-equivalent Maurice Gourdault-Montagne (MGM) told the Ambassador on January 22 that "some" are calling for France to freeze plans for establishing an international tribunal on Lebanon until next autumn, in the hope that this delay would allow Lebanese PM Siniora to break the political deadlock in Beirut. MGM said that President Chirac did not espouse a delay, but suggested (more than once) that the Lebanese themselves might request one. Turning to Iran, he provided a somewhat unpersuasive explanation of Chirac's rationale for contemplating the dispatch of a high-level envoy to Tehran, saying such an envoy might help to dispel misunderstandings of French policy aims on a number of regional questions, and indicating that he himself would not serve as an envoy to Tehran and neither would FM Douste-Blazy. On Iraq, MGM said that France wanted to see Iraq serve once again as a buffer against Iranian expansionism, but doubted that the West had sufficient resources to end Iranian influence in Iraq while simultaneously solving the country's economic problems. On Afghanistan, he reviewed the achievements of the Riga Conference with satisfaction but said no European country was prepared to send additional troops at this time. End summary.

Lebanon: Putting the Tribunal on Ice  
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[12](#). (S) The Ambassador hosted French NSA-equivalent Maurice Gourdault-Montagne (MGM) for breakfast on January 22. MGM cheerfully reviewed preparations for the January 25 Lebanon Conference, saying France would announce a contribution of 500 million euros, while Germany would pledge somewhere in the neighborhood of 80 million euros. He observed with pleasure that British FM Beckett was now planning to attend (a reversal he gratefully attributed to U.S. encouragement). The only disappointment, he said, was Russia, which would be represented by Special Middle East Envoy Saltanov, even though FM Lavrov's schedule could have permitted him to attend at least the opening session.

[13](#). (S) MGM said he saw little chance of resolving Lebanon's domestic political crisis prior to the Lebanese presidential election in November 2007. Consequently, some had raised the idea of "putting the tribunal in the freezer" until that time, in hopes that a delay in setting up the tribunal would aid PM Siniora to break the political deadlock. "Of course, we (neither he nor Chirac) are not advocating this idea," MGM stressed at several points. Nevertheless, he continued, the Lebanese themselves might ask the French and the U.S. to put

the tribunal on ice, in part because Siniora would need the opposition's help in order to deliver the economic reforms that the GOL is promising at this week's conference. The only other option, MGM continued, would be to change the scope of the tribunal itself -- something France found unacceptable. When pressed on why the French were contemplating a change in their approach to the tribunal at this point -- especially when it was unclear that Lebanon's opposition had the upper hand -- MGM made another (and somewhat jumbled) reference to the need to obtain the opposition's support for economic reform.

#### Chirac's Iran Envoy: Is the Idea Dead or Not?

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¶4. (S) Turning to recent media reports concerning President Chirac's plans to send a high level envoy to Iran, MGM said he was strongly reminded of how a few years ago internal USG discussion of possible changes in Iran policy had been leaked to the Wall Street Journal, thereby killing the proposed discussion before it had a chance to take place. He said Chirac's envoy proposal had suffered much the same fate after those opposed to any change in the French approach to Iran (MGM did not speculate on who they might be) leaked the content of sensitive MFA-Elysee discussions to Le Monde. (Although Le Monde approached him for comment before running with the piece, MGM said the journalist already had "the whole story.")

¶5. (S) MGM acknowledged that the Elysee had two concerns about sending an envoy to Tehran. First, one could argue (and Saudi King Abdallah did, in the strongest terms) that sending an envoy to engage the Iranians on Lebanon would merely consecrate Iran's role in Lebanon. (The

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counterargument, MGM said, was that Iran's influence is a fact, like it or not.) The second concern was that the Iranians might try to parley the overture into an invitation to attend the January 25 Lebanon Conference. "But even if they had asked, we weren't going to invite them," MGM assured the Ambassador.

¶6. (S) As for the virtues of engaging with Tehran, MGM argued that it would be useful to dispel Iranian misperceptions of France's policy aims in the Middle East without engaging in a debate on those aims. Hence, Chirac had mulled the possibility of arming his envoy with a letter to Supreme Leader Khamenei, which would spell out France's position on Israel (i.e., that it has a right to exist), on UNSCR 1701 (that all states are obligated to work toward its full implementation), and on Iran's need to promote regional stability (code for stop interfering in Iraq). In addition, Chirac and his advisors reasoned that an envoy's visit might strengthen the hand of President Ahmadinejad's critics.

¶7. (S) MGM stressed that the idea of sending Foreign Minister Douste-Blazy was no longer an option, not only because of the Le Monde leak but also because of vehement opposition from Saudi Arabia and Egypt. MGM also made it clear that he himself would not be an envoy to Tehran, given the likelihood that the Iranians would try to oblige him to see President Ahmadinejad (which neither Chirac nor his advisers will do, given Ahmadinejad's public declarations on Israel). However, MGM did not categorically exclude the possibility that Chirac would not send someone else (e.g., Jean-Claude Cousseran) as an envoy.

#### UNIFIL: A Solution on Drones?

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¶8. (S) MGM indicated that France was searching for a solution to the problem of operating UAVs (i.e., "drones") over southern Lebanon in the wake of recent statements by Hizballah claiming that France would share with Israel any intelligence collected by the drones. MGM said France would

not allow Hizballah to draw red-lines impinging upon the operations of French peacekeepers; Hizballah had attempted this once before with respect to the deployment of Leclerc tanks, and the French had deployed the tanks anyway. However, he confirmed a difference of opinion between the Ministries of Defense and Foreign Affairs: the military was determined to operate the drones (which were shipped to UNIFIL at the request of UNDPKO), whereas the diplomats advised caution. Consequently, MGM said the French were leaning towards a "demonstration flight" held in the presence of members of the Lebanese Armed Forces with "maximum transparency" so that it would be clear to the Lebanese public that the UAV flights would not be used as a source of intelligence for Israel. The final decision, he emphasized, would only be made by Chirac himself.

¶9. (S) Noting that on the ground cooperation between Lebanese civilians living in UNIFIL's area of operations and French peacekeepers ended overnight following FM Douste-Blazy's ill-considered declaration that Hizballah was an enemy to France, MGM said France "must walk a fine line" while not allowing Hizballah to dictate terms to UNIFIL. If necessary, France could reinforce its military presence by deploying the second of two battalions pledged to UNIFIL last year. MGM confirmed that in February, the French would conduct a 6-month review of their participation in UNIFIL. While he foresaw no change in France's participation as a result of this review, he conceded that any attack against French peacekeepers would likely lead to further evaluation of France's role. Moreover, he admitted that the French are deeply concerned that Hizballah might attempt to kidnap French peacekeepers in the run-up to the French presidential elections this Spring.

Syria

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¶10. (S) Noting ruefully that a velvet revolution does not appear to be in prospect any time soon in Damascus, MGM expressed mild concern over the future of France's Syria policy once Chirac leaves office. "Any new government will be tempted to think that talking to the Syrians is the answer," he said, adding that while Socialist Party candidate Segolene Royal had indicated her agreement with the general thrust of current French policy, Interior Minister Sarkozy remained somewhat vague on the issue. MGM noted that FM Muallim has summoned the French ambassador in Damascus to a

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meeting on January 25, in what the French were regarding as a sign of Syrian anxiety about the success of the International Conference for Lebanon.

Afghanistan

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¶11. (S) MGM expressed satisfaction with the outcome of the NATO Summit in Riga, and, looking ahead to the informal ministerial on January 26, he emphasized that no EU country was prepared to send additional troops to Afghanistan at this time. However, he said there was a willingness to undertake further consultation on how to combine civil/military objectives in Afghanistan (e.g., counternarcotics). While offering a justification for France's proposed contact group, MGM did not press the point.

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